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Friendly Advice to Single  
Persons, 1816

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A  
FRIENDLY ADDRESS  
TO  
SINGLE PERSONS,  
WHO ARE  
*RELIGIOUSLY DISPOSED:*

DESIGNED AS  
A CAUTION UPON A SUBJECT  
WHICH MAY BE OF  
GREAT IMPORTANCE TO THEM IN  
FUTURE LIFE.

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THE THIRD EDITION.

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## TO THE READER.

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**T**HE design of this Address\* is to offer some advice on a very important subject, and to caution young people, who are truly religious, or are sincerely seeking the salvation of their souls, against every step towards any matrimonial connexion which is not according to the Word of God, nor calculated to promote their happiness in this life; and to keep at the utmost distance from every temptation, however agreeable the object, or advantageous the offer may be in temporal things.

Some people will probably object, that the Scriptures quoted in this Address only forbid the marriage of Christians with Heathens. It may be presumed, the reason why it is thought wrong for Christians to marry with Heathens is, because they would be in danger of falling into idolatry. But is not every natural man, baptized or unbaptized, an idolater? He may not, with Pagans, bow to the sun, or the lovely moon walking in her brightness; nor pray to departed saints, as in the Church of Rome: But has he not set up his idols in his heart? Does he not love father, mother, life, lands, more than Christ? This the Scriptures account idolatry, because the affections are fixed on the creature, not on God. And this idolatry of the heart seems to be of the worst kind, because of its concealment from human observation, and for the same reason has the greatest tendency to corrupt others, especially in so near a relation as that of a marriage-

\* This pamphlet (except a few alterations and additions,) has already gone through two editions, under the title of "A Serious Address to Single Persons: Designed as a caution against improper marriages." This is mentioned on account of the change of the title-page, lest it should appear to be a design upon persons to get them to buy it a second time.



union. Moreover, is not every natural man at enmity with God? Rom. viii. 7; in a state of darkness, 1 Cor. ii. 14; and of spiritual death? Rom. viii. 6.—Now, is it likely; nay, is it possible, that a man who is alienated from God in affection, ignorant of his real state as a fallen sinner, and of Christ as the Saviour of his soul, should help a woman that loves the Lord, to increase with all the increase of divine grace? Is it possible that he who knows not one step of the way to heaven, should instruct another in this journey? If any person be weak enough to expect it, the disappointment must be great indeed. Whatever advantages men may gain by the christian name, they are heathens in heart and life, as to the things of God, till they are “born again.” Nor can they, unless converted by grace, dwell with God in his kingdom, 2 Thess. i. 8. For as they know not God by experience of his goodness, and obedience to his laws, so He will not know them by an approbation of their conduct. Matt. vii. 23, Luke xii. 25, 26, 27.

It may be objected, on the other hand, that the Scriptures are sufficiently explicit on this subject, to direct every conscience that is awake, and therefore the address is needless. Admitting the clearness of Scripture on this and every other subject necessary to our holiness and happiness, it will not follow that all caution is needless. Many doctrines and duties of the gospel are plain and clearly understood: and yet much persuasion is necessary to lead to the practice of these duties. For instance, who does not know that meekness is a principal part of the Christian character? And yet gracious persons may find caution and intreaty necessary when provocations to anger succeed one another like the dashing waves of the sea. Who does not know that the Scriptures call us to love our enemies, to do good to them that hate us, to pray for

them that despitefully use us, and overcome evil with good; to take up our cross daily, and follow Christ thro' evil and good report? But have we no occasion for arguments, motives, and intreaties, to prevail on us thus to act in every trial? Nay, is not all the help we have from the pulpit, the press, the examples of the pious, the promises of the gospel, the influences of the Holy Spirit, and the hope of everlasting glory, little enough to excite to all diligence in making our calling and election sure? Is it not, therefore, necessary to stir up their minds by way of remembrance; especially if we consider how many around us, in the small circle of our acquaintance, act contrary to Scripture, reason, and conscience, in these matters, by indulging foolish desires and vain hopes, built on a sandy foundation: and how many others suffer a degree of loss in the divine life from this cause, who are yet restrained by providential circumstances from entering the marriage-state with persons of an opposite character?

Others may think, that this Address might have come from a much abler hand:—the author thinks so too, and has therefore waited in hope that something would be done; but as nothing of the kind has come to his knowledge, he offers this mite towards stopping the progress of a growing evil.—Where the heart is already entangled, there is little expectation of reclaiming; but to those who are still free, it may possibly prove a word in season. Should the reader reap the smallest advantage from it, he is requested to pray for the author, and give all the glory to God.

## A FRIENDLY ADDRESS, &c.

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**I**T is generally granted that the salvation of the soul is of the greatest importance, and that nothing can possibly countervail the loss of it. It is also readily admitted, that the uncertainty of life, the greatness of the change required, and the labour necessary in the work of our salvation, call for an early and earnest attention to it. Hence Solomon says, "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth;" and our Lord adviseth us to "Seek first the kingdom of God." But, alas! what is first in the advice of Christ, is generally last in the practice of men. Most are taken up with surrounding objects and earthly pursuits: Mirth, gaiety, dress, and company, lead them easy captives, and banish eternity from their thoughts. The best part of life is spent in the worst employments; the body, soul, and substance, are profanely withholden from God; and either life is cut short, or age is loaded with the sins of youth. The infirmities of the body are heightened by the terrors of a guilty mind, while death is aiming his unerring dart to hurry the soul into a dreadful eternity; there to receive the wages of sin, an everlasting banishment from the glorious presence of God.

What a singular mercy, then, is an early acquaintance with the things of God! To have, not only good inclinations, but clear convictions of our fallen, polluted state by nature, and of our actual offences in practice: Not only to be reformed from gross enormities, but to be thoroughly changed in our affections: To love God because he first loved us. Such persons are peculiarly dear to God: "I love them that love me, and they that seek me early shall find me," Prov. viii. 17. Like John, the beloved disciple, they are permitted to lean upon the



Saviour's bosom, and have near access to the throne of grace. They are called to excel in holiness, and, by an exemplary life and conversation, to be a blessing to mankind. Whatever station of life Providence may place them in, whether single or married, they, if found faithful, may eminently glorify God, and walk in the light of his countenance, till, like a shock of corn, they are fully ripe for the heavenly garner.

But the adversary of mankind will not suffer pious youths to go unmolested; they are sure to have all his subtilty and rage tried upon them. Objects will be presented; the profits and honours of the world will be promised by the deceiver, if they will but relax in their endeavours after holiness, and take up with earthly comforts. He will work upon the understanding to darken it; upon the judgment to pervert it; upon the imagination to deceive it with false colouring, and upon the affections to entangle and alienate them from God. Hence unwary persons are caught in his snare, the fountain of living waters is forsaken, and souls, once released from the burden of sin, are again brought under its dominion. Some of these, by the grace of God, recover from their fall, and cleave to him with full purpose of heart; while others drag heavily, or halt between God and the creature. But when the grace of God is retained, and the comforts of the Holy Ghost are enjoyed, young persons need much help from above to guide and guard them thro' the vicissitudes of life, and to keep them unspotted in the world.

Of all outward changes in this life, none is certainly of more importance than that from a single to a married state; and should, therefore, be weighed with deliberation, attended with much prayer, and diligent perusal of the Word of God. The law and the testimony should direct you in

this matter, and guard you from making a sinful choice. And it ought to be a matter of real consolation to you, that on this subject, that word is so clear and express: "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers," 2 Cor. vi. 14, 15, is as plain as that "God now commandeth all men every where to repent." And this prohibition is set before us in the strongest point of view by the following questions: "For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or, what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?" Most certainly none at all. Hence, all those that fear God, are strictly charged to forbear the company, counsel, and practice of sinners, with the utmost care: To turn away from them, as a passenger would from a thief, or a healthy man from one who has a contagious disease.—Prov. i. 10, 15, and iv. 14, 15. And it is no small part of the righteous man's character, that he "Walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful," Psal. i. 1.

Can it then be lawful for a pious man to take one of these for his nearest relation upon earth, and by outward ties to make her one with himself: Surely not while the above-mentioned command is found in the Bible. All the specious reasoning in the world cannot make that lawful, which God has so plainly forbidden.

Striking examples are not wanting to add weight to the precept. If we turn our eyes to the antediluvians, we may see the dreadful effects of sinful unions. "The sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair, and took them wives of all which they chose," Gen. vi. 2. And what was the consequence? Iniquity spread with an amazing swift-

ness, until "God saw that it was great upon the earth, and it repented him that he had made man." The awful deluge quickly followed: Millions on millions were cut off with a most dreadful stroke, and made lasting monuments of God's displeasure against unequal marriages.

For that fair female troop thou saw'st, so gay,  
 Yet empty of all good, wherein consists  
 Woman's domestic honour and chief praise.  
 To these, that sober race of men, whose lives  
 Religious, titled them the Sons of God,  
 Shall yield up all their virtue, all their fame  
 Ignobly, to the trains and to the smiles  
 Of these fair atheists, and now swim in joy,  
 And laugh, for which the world ere long must weep.

MILTON.

Samson, also, was an unhappy witness of this evil, in the punishment inflicted on him for his sin. His choice of a wife from the daughters of the Philistines, involved him in various and sore distresses; exposed him to many grievous temptations, which, gaining dominion over his passions, led him into multiplied and great offences against God. After such conduct, we need not wonder at Delilah's stealing his heart, and betraying him into the hands of his enemies, who stripped him of his locks, put out his eyes, and wantonly triumphed in his misery, while he was painfully grinding at the mill. And though he obtained mercy, Heb. xi. 32, yet his sin was punished with death, and his final happiness thereby greatly diminished.

Should it be said, that "Samson's going to Timnath for a wife, was of the Lord," we answer, the journey of the spies to search the land of Canaan, is ascribed to God, Numb. xiii. 1.; and Shimei's cursing David, is said to have been at God's bidding, 2 Sam. xvi. 10, and yet it appears that the labour of the spies originated with the people,

from their shameful distrust of the divine veracity, Deut. i. 19, &c. and was then permitted by the Lord as a punishment of their incredulity. And it is no less certain that Shimei's curses were not caused by a God of infinite purity, Lam. iii. 38, tho' the stream of his wickedness was directed by divine wisdom to fall on David's head. In like manner we must suppose Samson's conduct was highly displeasing to God and his worthy parents, as it was most strictly forbidden, Exod. xxiii. 31, Deut. vii. 3, Judges xiv. 3; but when he was determined to have the woman, right or wrong, the Lord suffered it, and used him in that way as a scourge to the Philistines, who had long vexed and oppressed his people Israel, and at the same time punished his iniquity by the object of his inordinate affection.

Solomon, likewise, after a most excellent choice of wisdom when he came to the throne, and shewing singular piety in building and dedicating the temple, was overcome by this snare; his glory was veiled, his conscience disquieted, and many of his subjects were probably corrupted by his bad example, Neh. xiii. 26.

Ezra and Nehemiah were painful spectators of this evil and its consequences in their day, Ez. ix. 2, Neh. xiii. 23, &c. The former rent his mantle as expressive of his grief and indignation, and both of them zealously strove to stop its dreadful progress. However, if neither precept nor example alone be sufficient to deter you from the practice, we will examine the subject more minutely, and consider the evils naturally resulting from a sinful choice, and the blessings which may reasonably be expected to flow from a lawful and prudent one.

We may readily and justly suppose, that where genuine religion is possessed by one, but not by the other, there cannot be any spiritual union or communion. No intercourse can be kept up on religious



subjects; no united application made to a Throne of Grace for divine help; no mutual delight in reading the word of truth; no joint endeavours to secure the fulness of grace here, or the crown of glory hereafter; but while the one is striving against temptation, the other is adding to its force in alienating the soul from God. And if a person finds it difficult to keep the life of faith without such an hindrance, and to run the Christian race without such a weight, what must it be with a constant impediment in so near a relation?

Again: Suppose a man should take such a wicked step, and marry an impenitent, unbelieving woman; he must either be humbled for his sin, and recover the divine favour, or continue unhumbled, departing from the living God. Admitting the former to be the case, which is more than he has just reason to expect, and that he is resolved to have the worship of God in his family; the wife complies with reluctance, perhaps sleeps in the exercise, is pleased when it is ended, and would gladly have no more of what to her is real drudgery. What a damp must this cast upon his fervour! What pain of mind must he feel on discovering in her such a temper and disposition! He had probably flattered himself that she would readily accede to every religious proposal, assist in holy exercises, and be a pleasing and agreeable companion in the various duties of life. How disappointed when he discovers his deception!

But again:—The husband must wish to speak of the things of God, and to order his conversation as becometh the gospel of Christ; but this cannot be pleasing to a mind unrenewed by grace; and we may therefore suppose she will attempt to give a turn to the conversation, and introduce something more agreeable to her own disposition. Should he be off his watch and comply, or out of tenderness,



yield to her wish, and talk over the news of the town and country, of one man's fame and another's disgrace, of the riches of a few, or the miseries of the multitude; what must be the effect of such an abuse of time, but the departure of God from the soul!

A pious man must see it his duty, likewise, to bring up his children in the fear of God; for this purpose to curb or break their wills, and to correct them for their faults, not sparing them merely for their crying, Prov. xiii. 24; and xix. 18. He will find it needful frequently to inform their tender minds by giving line upon line, and precept upon precept, Deut. vi. 6, 7, and to set before them, in a living example, the amiableness of religion, in a sweetness of temper, an affable disposition, a serious deportment, and a firm attachment to truth in all its branches. This example will speak louder than precept, impress more deeply, and be found more lasting than all the flowing eloquence a parent can possibly use. These little ones may reflect in their giddy youth, "This is not living as my father taught me. I am not copying after his example. He prayed with me, wept over me, and affectionately charged me to remember my Creator in the days of my youth, and to seek the Lord while he may be found."—But how painful these corrections to a fond mother, who will be ready to exclaim, as Zipporah did, Exod. iv. 25, "A cruel, (if not a bloody) husband art thou to me." Her indiscreet interference will, probably, defeat the father's intention, and harden the minds of his children against him.

"These are the product  
 "Of those ill-mated marriages thou saw'st,  
 "Where good with bad were match'd."

Nor can it be expected that she should instruct them in religion, while she herself is ignorant of

its principles, or destitute of its power ; and what is worse, example will be wanting to lead them in the right way to heaven. Unhappy children ! you see nothing in your mother's temper which shews the meek and humble mind of Christ : you hear nothing of that conversation which flows from the kingdom of heaven in the heart : you see none of those acts of kindness to the fatherless and widow in their affliction, which evidence pure and undefiled religion : she never tells you of the evil of sin, of the love of Christ in dying for you, or his readiness to receive you into his kingdom ; and though you see and hear of some of these in your pious father, yet he is little with you to impart the help you need.

As the difference in their spirit and disposition here is very great, the one acting from selfish, the other from divine motives, so it may be feared, the effects of them will extend through an awful eternity ; for should the wife continue impenitent, and die without forgiveness, there is no possibility of her entering into glory ; and how bitter the thought of an eternal separation ! That after the nearest natural union possible in this life, perhaps for many years, they must part to meet no more : the one must ascend to unclouded glory, the other descend to the dreadful pit, *from* whence there is no *return*, and *in* which there is no *rest*, Rev. xiv. 14, while the horrid gulph between them will remain for ever impassable, Luke xvi. 26.

Hitherto we have viewed the subject in the most favourable light. We have supposed the man to be humbled under a sense of his sin in such a choice, and restored to the divine favour ; but how often has it been otherwise ? How many melancholy instances have we known of the contrary ? This sin has been like the breaking forth of waters : it has led to hardness of heart, and impenitency of mind, which fitted the soul for endless perdition.

We have also considered the subject on the weakest side in another instance, by supposing the man to be pious, and the woman not so; for the natural superiority of the man gives him a right to act according to his own judgment, and happily keeps him from many restraints. But supposing the *woman* to be religious, and yet to act in this manner, viz. of giving her hand to a man that is unawakened; she engages to *obey* her husband, and by the weakness of her sex, and softness of her spirit, must be involved in numberless difficulties. She cannot insist upon family worship, nor command her household after her! She cannot expect sympathy, or a word in season from her husband, when weary in spirit, and may be restrained by him from seeking it in the society of Christian friends. Her wish may be to the gates of Zion; but he may insist on her abiding in her tent. She may desire the communion of saints, but he will prefer the company of sinners, and may daily grieve her spirit with their filthy and vain conversation.

But the common plea for this conduct is, "I hope I shall gain my partner to the Lord." Our hope of salvation for ourselves or others, should be founded on some scripture promise. But where is such a promise, or any thing like it, in the Bible? In what book, what chapter, what verse? Do you say in 1 Cor. vii. 14, "How knowest thou, O man, but thou shalt gain thy wife? and how knowest thou, O woman, but thou shalt gain thy husband?" Nay, the Apostle is here speaking to persons who have been brought to the knowledge of God since they entered the marriage state; and to them he gives blessed encouragement to hope their prayers will be answered in behalf of their partners. But this is quite a different matter, and affords no just room for hope to such as know the Lord, and yet marry persons who are ignorant of him. And for

you to talk thus, is, in effect, saying, that you will go out of the way of duty, to bring another in: you will transgress God's law, to excite another to obey it. Is not this doing evil that good may come? Is it possible for you to be serious, and talk thus? Consider St. Paul's reasoning upon this conduct, Rom. iii. 8: See to it then, that if you engage with any person, she be not only civil, but serious; not only a hearer, but a doer of the word; not only a professor, but, as far as can be judged, a real possessor of the grace of God.

You may probably urge, "Why, there have been instances of persons who have been instrumental in gaining their partners to the Lord." There may have been a few. In these God has done more than he had promised, and gone out of his common way. Perhaps he saw an uprightness of intention, with a great weakness of judgment; the former he kindly accepted, and the latter he pitied. But there have been *many* instances of the contrary kind. Those who had little doubt of gaining their partners, have themselves been drawn away from the source of bliss, to spend their money for that which is not bread; and their labour for that which satisfieth not. The flame of heavenly love has been extinguished; the seed of life has been choaked, and the last remains of seriousness have been well nigh swept from the soul. The heart has again been garnished with levity, and many things have invited a return of the unclean spirit, with all his wretched associates.

If, after all that has been said, you are determined to make the dreadful experiment, (which God forbid you should!) remember you have nothing to expect, but that your companion will be as painful as a thorn in your eye, or as a goad in your side; that your way will be strewed with briers, and your whole life be a scene of affliction. And indeed it



will be a blessing, should your sufferings end with life : it will be an infinite mercy if they do not terminate in your final ruin. And should your path be thus rough, there will be a sting in every affliction, because this is the fruit of your sin. You will not be able to say, "It is what was ordained for me." No ; you have broken the bounds prescribed in God's word, and are fallen into this misery. You might have walked in a smoother path, but this is the fruit of your choice. Never murmur, never repine ; but consider every thing short of everlasting torment as so much of undeserved mercy.

But supposing the person you engage with be truly pious, yet if there be not a similarity of sentiment in religious matters, it may, in many instances, be a source of uneasiness, by restraining free conversation, leading to different places and modes of worship, and may greatly affect the education of your children. For allowing a man to be sincere in his profession, he must suppose his own system of doctrines and mode of worship, to be the most scriptural and rational : this must necessarily lead him, from real affection, to attempt the conversion of his wife to the same tenets, and lead her to the same place of devotion. Now supposing the wife to be sincere likewise, and that she has not taken up her sentiments without due examination, it must be painful to her in the extreme, not only to be deprived of his company to and from the place of worship, but to be constantly teased with his notions in conversation. There are very few indeed in such a relation, who have candour and liberality sufficient to think and let think in these matters ; and therefore, this point demands your serious attention. For although these things may appear of little moment to those who have never studied the subject, or who have thought on it superficially ; yet in so close an union, and near an intimacy, every



difference in sentiment may produce very painful and fatal consequences.

Having viewed the evils resulting from a sinful union, let us now consider the happy effects of a lawful and proper one. These are great as well as numerous. Both parties being truly born again, and possessed of the spirit of the gospel, they are joined together in the Lord, and are one spirit with him. Their joint supplications ascend before God with acceptance, and blessings of every kind descend on their quiet habitation. The Holy Spirit takes pleasure in helping their infirmities, and delights to make his abode with them. Hence, they have not only a sweet union of spirit with each other, but can thankfully say, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ," 1 John i. 3. His gracious promise is often accomplished, "Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear," Isa. lxxv. 24. Their house is a Bethel divinely guarded. The Lord is their keeper, the Lord is their shade on their right hand, Psal. cxxi. 5. Their conversation is savoury to each other, and useful to all around them. Bearing each other's burden, they strive together for the hope of the gospel, and build each other up in faith and love. Is the one afflicted? The other tenderly feels. Is the one comforted? The other rejoices. If the one discovers any backwardness, the other kindly endeavours to remove it. If any improper warmth be seen in one, the other, by soft words, labours to turn it away. If at any time one be overtaken in a fault, the other strives to restore in the spirit of meekness. What peace in their minds! What harmony in their family! What ornaments are these to their profession! while they exemplify, in the whole of their conduct, the excellency of that religion which has so effectually changed the natural disposition

of their minds ! If there be any thing lovely in the marriage-state, it is, it must be found in such an union.

If they have children, it is their mutual aim to bring them up in the fear of God, by steering the happy medium betwixt a criminal austerity on the one hand, and a foolish indulgence on the other. Correction, if needful, is given with pity and moderation ; not in anger, but in love. It is preceded and followed with prayer to God for his blessing ; and where the children are capable of it, with mild reasoning on the impropriety of their conduct. Proper restraints are laid upon their inclinations ; suitable instructions are given, and just motives are used to cherish every good desire, and bring to maturity every hopeful blossom of divine Grace. And all these are carried home to the conscience by the example of the parents, who live the truths they teach, and by actions explain what the tender minds of their children could not otherwise understand.

Oh ye favoured children of such excellent parents ! You see in them the meekness and gentleness of Christ displayed. The strength of victorious grace in their conquest of the world ; their resisting the devil, and patiently suffering the various afflictions with which a gracious God may see fit to try their faith and constancy. You hear them talking of the goodness of God, the deliverance he has wrought out for them, and the blessed hope they have of being happy for ever in his immediate presence. You see in their conduct the features of truth and justice, religion and piety ; and have the way of holiness pointed out in living characters. You have many prayers offered up on your account, and are under peculiar obligations to know and worship the God of your father.

And ye happy parents, who have your quivers

full of children : Ps. cxxvii. 5 ; what an honour is put upon you by your Heavenly Father ! who gives you to raise up useful members of civil and religious society ; trees of righteousness, to bring forth fruit unto God ; heirs of glory, to be with you in heaven for ever. The promises, Ps. cxii. 2, Is. xlv. 3, are to you. The prayers you have offered to God shall not fall to the ground : Continue to pray, and believe for them, and you shall see the glory of God in their salvation.

Nor does their happiness end here : for tho' death will execute his commission as soon as permitted, and separate these lovely and loving friends, yet this separation is but partial, and for a little space : They may still meet in spirit, and worship before the throne of God ; the one before a throne of grace ; the other before a throne of glory. And after a few revolving months or years, they will meet again, to part no more for ever. Meet, where sorrow and sighing shall be no more ; where nothing shall destroy, interrupt, or diminish their glorious felicity. With what holy rapture will they retrace the footsteps of a kind Providence, in bringing them together, directing their steps, preserving their persons, guarding their property, and compassing them about with songs of deliverance ! With what ecstasies of joy and gratitude will they review the loving-kindness of God to them during their pilgrimage below : The answers of prayer, the profit they received under the word, and the many blessed seasons they had together on earth ! How will they wonder at the Divine Goodness, in completing their union above, and placing them among the thousands of Israel, while

“ They shout by turns the bursting joy,

And all eternity employ

In songs around the Throne !”

Thus you have a faint-view of this important sub-

ject on both sides ; of the evils proceeding from a sinful union, and the blessings those obtain who are joined together in the Lord. You see the misery the former must expect in this life, and the danger they are in of losing their own souls for ever. You see likewise, what will most probably be the effect as to their offspring, thro' a want of mutual endeavour and example to lead them in the right way. And lastly, what a dreadful separation they are likely to experience when the King of Heaven shall come in his glory, and separate mankind one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats : When the one shall be received with " Come, thou blessed ;" and the other be sent away with " Go, thou cursed."

Suffer the word of exhortation. Be persuaded, my young friends, at all events, to make the Bible your rule of conduct in this and every other matter. Never indulge a thought of giving your hand to one that is a stranger to religion, tho' loaded with silver and gold. Suffer not the amiableness of manners, the beauty of features, nor the charms of youth, to steal away your heart : but steadily repel every attraction of this kind, with—" It is written, Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers." Whenever you are in danger, betake yourselves to prayer, not under a pretence of enquiring what is the will of God, but for strength to obey a plain command. To pray for information in such a case, is tempting God, as Balaam did when forbidden to go to Balak.

But even where there is genuine piety, some degree of caution is necessary with respect to the understanding of the person you engage with ; otherwise your comfort in life may be greatly lessened. If you marry a woman of a superficial understanding, you can hardly expect your family to be kept in proper order, or your temporal affairs, of a



domestic kind, to be managed with that prudence which is necessary to make the marriage life altogether comfortable. Should you have friends to pay you an occasional visit, you would wish to accommodate them with propriety; but this cannot be expected where there is a considerable defect in intellectual capacity. If you would wish to return a friendly visit, you would certainly desire to have a wife that would not put you to the blush by her weakness or folly.—Yet, needful as caution may be on the woman's part, it is more especially so on the man's; for every gracious man has not a good natural understanding, and if a woman of sense be united to one of weak intellects, she will not find it very easy to obey where her superior understanding sees an impropriety in the command; but will be in danger of wickedly inverting the order of God, by assuming the husband's place, or of becoming habitually fretful under the frequent mortifications she must feel from this quarter. Nor should the TEMPER be unnoticed, or thought of little importance in so close an union; for where this is *naturally* rough and imperious, it will be in vain to expect tenderness and sympathy: If sour and morose, this leaven will probably render the marriage state very unpleasant: If sullen and sulky, it will greatly obstruct that openness of spirit, and freedom of conversation, which certainly ought to subsist betwixt a husband and a wife. If you think it proper to consider the temper of a servant, whom you may take into your house for a season, and may, almost at your pleasure, dismiss again; how much more expedient is it to regard the temper of one you take to your bosom for life.

Perhaps it may be objected by some persons, 1. "But surely religion will prove a certain cure of bad tempers, and render this care in the choice of a wife or a husband needless." To which objection



it may be answered, That so far as religion is experienced and practised, it certainly will tend to subdue whatever is contrary to the fruit of the Spirit, and promote every lovely disposition; but there are very few persons who enjoy so much of it, as not to leave the traits of their natural temper, or, as will at all times, keep it under entire restraint. 2. That few persons, comparatively, retain that degree of religion which they experience when justified freely: And if they suffer loss, their unhappy tempers will recover strength, and become a source of uneasiness to their relative connections. This should be considered before any direct steps be taken on either side:

“ Nor let the cruel fetters bind,  
 A gentle to a savage mind,  
 For love abhors the fight:  
 Loose the fierce tiger from the deer,  
 For native rage and native fear,  
 Rise and forbid delight.”

Again: It will be very proper to consider the prospect you have in temporal things, whether your present business will support a rising family, without any great embarrassment in circumstances, or incumbrance to your mind; or if you have any rational ground to hope that your income will be such by your marriage as to make your way in life easy and comfortable. Your feelings, if you have any sense of honour as a man, and your conscience, if you have any acquaintance with religion, will restrain you from taking a woman *chiefly* on account of her property: You will act from a more noble principle, that of real and particular affection to her, as one that you prefer, setting money quite out of the question, to all others in the world. Be equally careful not to plunge yourself, your partner, and offspring into distress. While wealth is attended with *snare*s, poverty is generally productive of *cares*, which no less choak the word of life, than the former. And many gracious persons, who,

while they remained single, made good progress in the christian race, have, when married, through care and anxiety, suffered loss, and made their way thro' life exceedingly painful. Remember Agur's prayer, and take care to make it yours, lest you should be poor, and steal, and take the name of the Lord in vain, Prov. xxx. 9.

When you find a proper person, let your conduct be every way prudent: Set the Lord always before you, Psal. xvi. 8, and abstain from the appearance of evil. Never conform to the shameful custom (found in some parts of this kingdom,) of sitting up together a great part of the night. Never be longer together than you can be in the fear of the Lord, and in the comforts of his blessed Spirit. The moment you feel yourself in danger of departing from God in affection, have recourse to prayer, and cry mightily to him for help, that you may not grieve the Holy Spirit.

It may be of real use to you, frequently to advise with serious, judicious friends, who have gone this way before you; who can impartially consider the subject, and may give useful instruction: And this is the more necessary if your affections are at all entangled, and have given an improper bias to your own judgment.\*

O let me prevail with you to act prudently! Consider not the difficulties in your way of duty,

\* It is much to be lamented, that persons about to make this most important change in life, are frequently less disposed to ask for information or take advice, than they are on almost every trivial occasion. If they be inclined to make a short excursion, to change their situation, or make any alteration in their place of residence; enquiries are made with care; information is sought with anxiety; and the most judicious of their friends are frequently consulted on the business; but in this matter, if any advice at all be asked, it is probably of young, inexperienced persons, like themselves, or when the affections are entangled, and the resolution is too weak to follow it. It is strongly recommended to you, therefore, to ask advice of the most prudent pious persons you can find, *before* you take one step with the person to whom you feel any attachment: otherwise you may find it very difficult, either from yourself, or the person you address, afterwards to recede with honour and a good conscience.

but the promise and power of God. He will help and strengthen you. Whatever you lose in the way, you will not lose in the end; nay, it shall be more than made up to you in this present life by the peace and consolation of the Holy Spirit, and probably in outward things also. If your eye be single, your whole body shall be full of light. The God of Abraham, who prospered the way of his servant when seeking a wife for Isaac, Gen. xxiv. 42, &c. will direct your steps, and lead you in the right path: Will give you one who shall be an help-meet to you in things pertaining to the kingdom of God, as well as in things of this present world. As your way of duty will be made plain by his Word, Spirit, and Providence; so your union shall be crowned with his approbation and blessing. You will enter this new relation under the banner of your Lord, and with a covenant-right to all the inheritance of his saints. Living, like Zecharias and Elizabeth, who were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless, Luke i. 6, you shall experience what is so beautifully expressed in Job v. 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, and 26; and if both be found faithful until death, shall receive the crown of life, and be made like unto the angels of God, who neither marry, nor are given in marriage. Then shall that remarkable prophecy, Zeph. iii. 17, be fully accomplished, "The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty: He will rejoice over thee with joy: He will rest in his love; he will joy over thee with singing:" while all the church of the first-born, and the spirits of the just made perfect, most devoutly join you in saying, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion, for ever and ever. Amen."

